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# Dethroning Prince Charming: Problematizing Human Rights in the World's Last Shangri-La

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# Dethroning Prince Charming

*Problematizing Human Rights in the World's Last Shangri-La*

**Abstract:** In the 21st century universalization of Human Rights has appeared as a contested concept. The Savage, Victim, Savior (SVS) metaphor has become a common rhetoric that universalization of human rights has promoted. The savage is represented as a non western nation-state, the victims are portrayed as minorities, women, children etc, and the saviors are usually the western nations or international institutions such as the UN, HRW, Amnesty International. The SVS complex leads to a one-dimensional, incomplete, racist, neo colonial and bias standpoint. It limits our understanding of the actual issue. Ethnic cleansing is an instance where universalization of human rights has limited our understanding. This study will analyze the 1990s ethnic friction between the Lhotshampas and the Drukpas in Bhutan to portray how the SVS metaphor has been used by the Human Rights corpus. The case study portrayed severe flaws related to universalization of Human Rights as it produced reports and notions that demonized the state with an incomplete and extremely lopsided approach. An informed analysis that represents human rights issues from a multidimensional perspective, contributes towards the need for human rights advocates to self reflect in the 21st century.

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# Introduction

*“While human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds”*

-Bangkok Declaration of the Representatives of Asian States, 2 April 1993

Following the decades of World War II, the adherence to the western notion of Human Rights has become a “norm” in the new world order. The notion of human rights had previously originated from the western philosophy of “natural rights”<sup>1</sup> and the through western historical events. The principles encoded in the Human Rights norms were created against the “communism and the internal threat to civil right movement” (Koshy, 1999:5). This ideology primarily headed by the West, expected all nations to respect and follow their standards of human rights.

Asian nation states in particular have been subjected to this adherence. From China’s communist behavior to, South and North Korea’s inability to provide full freedom of expression, to India and Pakistan’s unholy war in Kashmir, Asian nations have always been scrutinized by the human rights corpus. The violations to these “universal” laws, led to portraying non western nation-state as undemocratic, ethically immoral and wrong. It led complex national issues such as ethnic cleansing being explained by a single narrative: The Western narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> Concept coined by Lock that underscores that, all individuals are born with "inalienable," God-given rights can never be taken or even given away. He argues that due to this notion everyone is equality. Locke said, "life, liberty, and property" are some fundamental natural rights.

The history, culture, philosophies, and geographical backgrounds of the East differ at large from the West. Thus, the failure to incorporate western Human Rights ideology to the East was primarily driven by the fact that it was an alien notion to begin with. Imposing these notions also produced a skewed, black and white attitude towards moral ethics. Following a similar pattern of perceived moral high ground, Bhutan also known as the world's last Shangri-La has been accused of violating the human right norms. In the late 1980s, there was a growing Lhotshampa population in Bhutan. The Bhutanese government saw this as a threat to the culture and demographic of the Drukpas, who were ethnically similar to Tibetans and were Buddhist, as opposed to the Lhotshampas, who were Hindus. As illegal immigration of the Lhotshampas increased several measures were taken by the government to expel 80,000 people to the Nepali border. However, the international momentum that this issue has gained led to many people describing the event a systematic "ethnic cleansing" of the Lhotshampa people. However, these viewpoints are constructed without acknowledging Bhutanese history, culture and struggle. Needless to say, this did not capture the Drukpa perspective.

This study will aim to analyze how the problematizing human rights in the last Shangri-la has produced a skewed, unidimensional and bias account on the 1990's event in Bhutan. This small country also represents a greater problem that already exists between Asia and the West, where by the eastern nations have adopted noncompliance attitudes towards the universalization of human rights.

## Literature Review

The push towards achieving a "new universalistic ethics of human rights" has gained increasing importance after the second world war (Koshy, 1999: 1). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has appeared as the most important international legal document that

represents the ethical standard of achievement for nation-states (Stacy, 2009; Donnelly, 2013). The United Nations, which is the constitutional basis for the UDHR defines Human Rights as inherent rights that human beings of all nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status possess (UDHR). It calls for equal rights for everyone without discrimination. Based on this ideology, the UN declared that human rights is an essential element for the survival of humankind. The implementation of universal human rights has often been “expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law general principles and other sources of international law” (UNHR). The compulsory nature of the UDHR expects “governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups” (UNDHR). The declaration and implementation, spearheaded by the UN, has played an important role in the universalization of the human rights notions. This has led to a viewpoint where by adhering to Human Rights norms have become the “standard” and the only way to be a part of the “civilized” international community (Aiken, 2009; Donnelly, 2013; Mutua, 2001; Asad, 2000; Koshy, 1999). The human rights imperialism discourse has come about as a result of “othering” certain nation that does not concur with the international “norms” despite the well intentions behind the ideology.

The human rights imperialism literature has identified two non state actors namely, NGOs and global mass media that have “assumed a crucial role in shaping the discourse of human rights” and universalizing them (Koshy, 1999: 18; Mutua, 2001; McGregor 2005). However, the attempts to impose a “one fits all formula” to the non-western world have led to much criticism as it has been unable to reach out to the national and local actors. This implies that the implementation of the theoretical concept of “natural” human rights is flawed. It has

encouraged dividing nations into two categories “good” state and “evil” state. The “good” state is one which internalizes human rights, usually the West, and the “evil” state is the one which is illiberal and antidemocratic and does not follow human rights, usually the East (Mutua, 2001; Asad, 2000). Furthermore, this ultimatum that the universalization portrays is a very simplistic, and unidimensional conceptualization.

The savages-victims-saviours (SVS) metaphor has appeared to execute the underlying rhetoric behind the universalization of human rights, in literature. SVS is a three dimensional metaphor that demonstrates how universal human rights advocates uses this analogy to rationalize the underpinnings of human rights violations.

Under this metaphor the savage is usually portrayed as the state, which are usually the “third world world” (Asad, 2000: 1). The states are thought of as the reason why human rights norms fail to be implemented (Mutua, 2001; Stacy, 2009). States are expected to follow a western style democracy that rejects “non western political culture as undemocratic” (Mutau, 2001: 24). The human rights ideology is largely driven by western notions which are liberal, and states that lie outside this tradition is demonized. However, as state is a manifestation of “normative cultural fabric,” the culture and not the state becomes the real savage (Mutau, 2001: 23). In other words, the advocacy of human rights across cultural borders attempts to displace local the culture with the universal culture of human rights. An example of villainizing the culture can be seen through the UNDHR’s outcry on female genital cutting.

The metaphor of the victim is usually presented as “helpless innocent who has been abused directly by the state, its agent, or pursuant to an offensive cultural or political practice” (Mutau, 2001:28). They usually constitute of marginalized ethnic groups, uneducated citizens, poor groups, women, children and minorities. The language used by the human rights advocates

necessitates for an outside intervention to help the victims. More often than not, the victims identified by the human rights corpus are portrayed as non-white who are usually from Asia, Africa or Latin America. It can be observed that the relationship between the non-whites (the victims) and the advocates of human right (the west) is reminiscent of how colonialist viewed the natives as victims. This leads to a rhetoric of identifying the victims as “others” and “people ‘over there’ and not people ‘like us’” (Mutau, 2001: 31).

The savior metaphor is identified by two characteristics, namely the Euro-US centralism and “christianity’s missionary zeal” (Mutau, 2001:21; Asad, 2000). This metaphor deeply embedded in western beliefs that depicts a scenario whereby white people from the west saves the victims from the third world. Koshy has argued that universalization of human rights is a form of neo colonialism. In other words, the white saviour complex is derived from this metaphor. International Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and mass media constitute perhaps the most important element of the saviour metaphor. Mainly funded by the western nations NGOs and mass media are the actors for perpetually imposing western values to the so called “third world”.

The SAS complex used by mainstream human rights corpus literature accentuates huge limitations and flaws in their reasoning. Their argument focuses on a fixed pattern, unidimensional, lopsided and simplistic viewpoint. Utilization of the SAS complex also leads to the following critiques for the universalization of human rights.

One, although the human rights corpus is well meaning it is fundamentally based on Eurocentric and Anglo centric historical and cultural values (Mutau, 2001; Koshy 1999). The current regime is criticised for having values that are primarily centered around the individual rather than the community (Mutua, 2001; McGregor, 2005; Koshy, 1999; Bonnet, 2015). Asian

nations have used this reasoning to point out the irrelevance of the present human rights norms (Koshy, 1999; McGregor, 2005). Human rights is “part of the cultural package of the west, complete with an idiom of expression, a system of government, and certain basic assumptions about the individual and his relationship with society” (Mutau, 2001: 34). Mutua states that “human rights, and the relentless campaign to universalize them, present historical continuum in an unbroken chain of western conceptual and cultural dominance over the past several centuries” (p.15). This draws on the idea of western values made by the west for the west. Needless to say, agencies (such as NGOs and mass media) that embody this ideology use a western moral compass while reporting on historically and culturally sensitive issues such as ethnic cleansing.

Lee Manwoo (1985) of China had stated that “different civilizations or societies have different conceptions of human beings. Hence, they have a different attitude towards human rights issues” (Donnelly, 2013: 77). Thus, the failure to add the non western cultural narratives portrays the second criticism. The current narrative rejects the “cross contamination of cultures and instead promotes a Eurocentric ideal” (Mutau, 2001: 12). The inability to incorporate other narratives shows a trade off between cultural relativism and succession to the universalization of human rights (Koshy, 1999). Additionally, the non western cultures are also usually viewed as inferior or backwards compared to western cultures and are thought of to need civilization.

Three, the human rights corpus fails to address issues of power. There is an important call for the power dynamic of human rights advocates to be more multicultural, inclusive and deeply political. The exclusivity of the corpus pushes for moving away from considering the west as the center and other cultures (non western) as the peripheries (Mutau, 2001: 13).

Four, the language rhetoric used by the human rights corpus falls into significant theoretical problems. The terminology used by the UN charter to ask its members to legitimize



the right to fundamental human rights appears as a noble gesture but it is unclear on who determines these rights; most likely determined by the west. This shows how institutions such as the UN have a false facade on the promoting “equal” views. It is also interesting to note that the irony of the West advocating for fundamental rights by imposing their views on the “others.” It forces the conversion to their point of view.

Five, the role of race in the development of the human rights narrative is largely absent. The globalization of human rights “fits a historical pattern in which all high morality comes from the west as a civilizing agent against lower forms of civilization in the rest of the world” (Matua, 2001:). The SAS complex depicts the West as the white saviour saving non white victims. The SVS metaphor carries racial connotation and promotes international hierarchy which is reminiscent of the narrative for colonialism.

Ethnic cleansing is an instance when universalization of human rights limits our understanding on the situation as it produces reports and notions that are incomplete and extremely lopsided. The official United Nations definition of ethnic cleansing is "rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area person of another ethnic or religious group". It appears that humanitarian intervention to “avert genocide or ethnic cleansing would appear an unvarnished good” (Kuperman, 2008: 1). However, intervening and reporting of ethnic cleansing has been a major field where the the human rights advocates have produced reports and notions that are incomplete and extremely lopsided. A classic example has been on the HWR intervention during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has nothing critical to say when “the NATO powers had begun the bombing of Yugoslavia on March 24, 1999” rather it focused mainly on the crimes of the target country then under attack (Herman et al., 2007). And in a 1998, HRW “urged regime-change for

Yugoslavia, either through President Slobodan Milosevic's indictment or a U.S. war to affect the same outcome" (Herman et al., 2007). However, Milosevic was charged with war crimes atrocities that was committed during his rule. The role of HRW and other western organizations shows "a clear adaptation of HRW definitions of human rights and choice of worthy victims to the needs of the Western powers and institutions that nurture the organization" (Herman et al., 2007). There are also other instances where human rights corpus and advocates have produced one sided arguments. Saddam Hussein's crimes against the Kurds, has repeatedly been called a "genocide," however, "the number of Iraqis killed by Western sanctions were between five and ten times the number of Kurds killed by Baghdad forces, but don't get mentioned, let alone described as victims of genocide" (Herman et al., 2007).

The grand narrative on the discourse on human rights contains a "subtext that depicts an epochal contest pitting savages [state], on the one hand, against victims and saviours [west], on the other" (Mutua, 2001:1). Further criticisms such as, the lack of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, "othering" of non western cultures and the central of Western ideology has also been identified. The aforementioned fault lines of the human rights corpus have lead NGOs and mass media to produce biased reports on issues from the third world that conceal the complexity of the situation. The forceful nature of the human rights norms fails to consider the historical, cultural, economical and social factors narrative to the issue. These irregularities that are risen from universalizing human rights has made explaining sensitive issues such as ethnic cleansing an immense challenge for the world.

## Hypothesis

Despite the “equality” that the human rights corpus proclaims to have, there also appears to be a pattern whereby states from the East are always the perpetrators and states from the West are always the emancipators. In other words, the non-western states are not always “evil” and the western states are not always “good.” Cultures, traditions and ideologies differ across states and creating a “one size fits all” ethically laws (eg: UNDHR) do not solve the problems. The compelling evidence spoken against the universality of human rights is portrayed by the strong disagreements that Asian nations have always had with the human rights corpus. The 1993, world conference on human rights included the Bangkok Declaration of the Representatives of Asian States that stated, “[w]hile human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.” The absence of multiculturalism in human rights have led to issues such as ethnic cleansing being explained with a narrow lens.

Existing literature on the dominance of the human rights norms in the global arena are only able to analyze ethnic cleansing using the SVS metaphor. However, the use of the analogy leads to upstem limitations, biases and incoherence to the complex issue. The mainstream notion of human rights advocates always holding the moral high ground, and always helping innocent “victims” and tells only a single story.

A single story has also been told about the “ethnic cleaning” of 1990 in Bhutan. NGOs and mass media has taken the lead in analyzing the issue. However, their analysis has unfortunately also followed the SAS metaphor. Thus, it becomes vital to analyze and understand the problematization of human rights from a multidimensional and culturally sensitive viewpoint.

This study hypothesizes that the mainstream acceptance of human rights fails to capture the entire story of Bhutan, a small landlocked country. This case will also illustrate the pattern of incomplete comprehension of ethnic cleansing in the foothills of the Himalayas.

## Methodology & Background

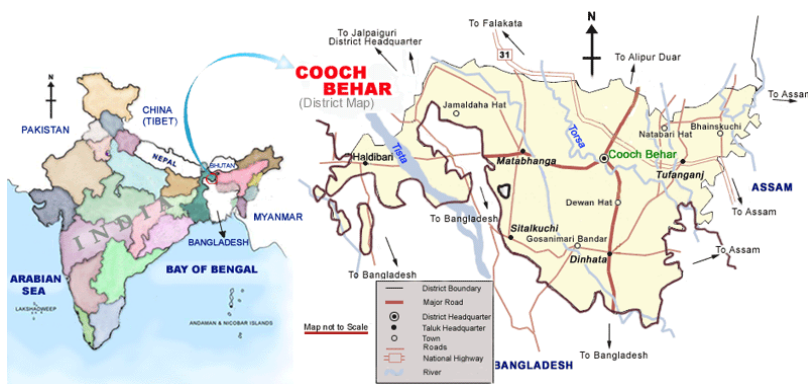
A single case study was chosen for this paper because of the limited academic research on the Drukpa/Lhotshampa issue in Bhutan. Majority of the accounts that exist on this issue are written by NGOs or western media. Amnesty International, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch and, *The New York Times*, have criticized Bhutan, a nation usually known for peace and happiness, for being hypocritical and for violating the basic human rights of an ethnic minority. These criticisms have shaped the greater part of the world view on the event as well. However, the nation's point of view of the nation-states is lacking. This makes the internal ethnic conflict of Bhutan an ideal case study to research because the narrative from the nation-state is missing. A single case study was chosen for this paper because of the limited academic research on the Drukpa/Lhotshampa issue in Bhutan.

For a small country such as Bhutan, that is sandwiched between two Asian giants, security has always been of high importance. The government's primary role has been to ensure that Bhutan as a nation always maintains sovereignty. Thus, to comprehend the problematization of human rights in Bhutan, it is important to understand the historical and geopolitical underpinnings.

Located in the foothills of the Himalayas, Bhutan is situated between two giants of the world: India and China. The mountainous rugged terrain makes the country landlocked and is approximately 38,394 sq. km large with 753,947 people living sparsely across the country (World Bank). Living in isolation for decades, Bhutan was never colonized nor faced the

atmosphere of instability brought by the cold war. Nevertheless, the Bhutanese society has traditionally been “sensitive to issues of security, and preserving its sovereign independence and territorial integrity” (Center for Bhutanese Studies, 2004: 3). These challenges for Bhutan were particular visible with instances such as the encounter with the British and the 1950’s China’s aggression.

It was not until 1765, that the British and the Bhutanese were in contact with each other. The two had a dispute over the succession the throne of Kuch Bihar (‘Cooch Behar’), to the south of Bhutan. Consequently, in 1772, the Bhutanese were driven out of Kuch Bihar, which led to “alarm not only in Bhutan but in Nepal and Tibet as well” (Hutt, 2005: 34). As a result, Bhutan became an intermediary towards establishing trading relations with tibet and China, for the British. This encounter marked the first of many encounter Britain and Bhutan had over territorial disputes. Years preceding the dispute, Bhutan had considered siding with Gorkha and Raja of Kuch Bihar the against the British (Singh 1988: 298). This potential revolt troubled the



British which resulted to certain territories being restored to Bhutan.

Figure 1: Cooch Bihar and Bhutan Boundary

However, territorial tension still continued as Assam which borders Bhutan to the south and east, became a British possession after the Anglo-Burmese War of 1825–6 (Hutt, 2005). This led to the Bhutanese border with Bengal and Assam becoming a place of continual boundary disputes. Singh reported that, these border areas which were known as *Duars*<sup>2</sup> were traditionally used by the northern Bhutanese during the cold season as the South has sub tropical vegetation (Singh 1988). In November 1864, the British went to war with Bhutan, which resulted in the Treaty of Sinchula, signed on 11 November 1865. The signing of the treaty resulted into Bhutan giving the British control over external relations along with receiving an annual ‘subsidy’ of Rs 50,000 to the government of Bhutan to compensate for the loss of revenue caused by the annexation of the Duars. Bhutan’s treaty with the British was a clear indicator of the struggle the small nation had with its boundaries.

This trend of challenging Bhutan’s self determination continued into the 19th century as well. The takeover of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China in 1949 had shaken the geopolitical scene in the Himalayan region. Chinese troops annexed Bhutanese enclaves in Tibet and approached Bhutan’s borders, the country was put in a position to reevaluate its traditional policy of isolation. Consequently, Bhutan turned to India to for assistance. For India’s own security too, “the stability of Himalayan states falling within its strategic interest was a crucial factor to consider” (Visweswaran, 2011: 299). The first visit of India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Paro Bhutan in 1958 was marked as a start of a “special relationship” between the two countries. The establishment of its relations with India gained other levels of momentum, over time, as India started managing Bhutan’s foreign relations in exchange for

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Duar’ or ‘Dooar’ is a derivation from the Sanskrit word *dvāra*, or ‘door.’ The region has been described as ‘a narrow slip of land, ranging in breadth from ten to twenty miles, which runs along the base of the lower range of Bootan hills from the Darjeeling District to the Frontier of Upper Assam’ (Eden, 1864: 6-7), This region also has fertile land.

protection and aid. Bhutan officially opened to the outside world in the 1960s and with the help of India, Bhutan was able to become a member of the UN in 1971. The combination of the Chinese aggression and her geographical proximity to India had made holding on to its independence and sovereignty a constant challenge for Bhutan.

It is important to note that these conditions produced a frame of reference for Bhutan during its initial stages of nation building. Historically, the constant challenge to hold onto its borders had pushed the Bhutan into consolidating its power internally and thereby deliberately implementing the isolationist policy. The self-imposed isolation had contributed immensely towards building and preserving Bhutanese culture, which was one way of maintaining sovereignty.

### **History of the Contested People**

This account on the Lhotshampa history is close to being unheard and unacknowledged in the international arena. Thus, the blogpost of Dasho Jigme Thinley, who was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan, has been used as the source.

Bhutan's history with the Nepali/Lhotshampa was based on the historical background of constant challenge towards the small nations' sovereignty. The 18th century encounters between the British and Bhutan, reported that "in none of these accounts is there any mention of any kind of Nepali presence in the kingdom" (Hutt, 2005). Supporting this statement Jigmi Thinley, the first Prime Minister of Bhutan also stated that 'the first sightings of Nepalese in the southern foothills are reported by Charles Bell in 1904' (1994: 45) and that '*no Nepalese ever crossed beyond the Teesta river until after 1865*' (Jigme Thinley, 1994). However, the Lhotshampas have argued that they were present in Bhutan much earlier than the 19th century (Pulla, 2016).

In 1856, the East India Company took advantage of the booming tea industry where “the Nepalese were recruited in the absence of local labourers” (Thinley, 2010). The demand for Nepalese spread along the Bengal Duars and finally to Bhutan as establishments of tea gardens grew. Despite the isolation policy, Bhutan recruited Nepalese labourers (tangyas) in 1900, and made them citizens and gave them land to farm. The Lhotshampa are “linguistically and ethnically a diverse group with ancestral roots in Nepal and Darjeeling (in India)” (Pulla, 2016: 3). They mainly follow the Hindu religion, however, some followed Buddhism as well.

The Bhutanese took several measures to integrate the Southern Bhutanese into mainstream Bhutanese society. In 1985-1986, the use of the term “Lhotsampa” was introduced to refer to the Southern Bhutanese, which “gave them a standard Bhutanese nomenclature” and helped them assimilate into society (Jigme Thinley). And anyone who failed to use the term was fined. Restrictions such as entry and travel of Lhotshampas were lifted. The south experienced “large share of the development budget” (Thinley, 2010). Aside from increased infrastructure projects such as the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC)<sup>3</sup>, which recruited Lhotshampas, the Hill Irrigation Project of Chirang, the Gaylegphug Area Development Project were also established. An overall employment of Lhotshampas into the Bhutanese Army and civil jobs also took place. School became integrated with Nepali as a medium of communication, and the government also approved plans for the “establishment of an apex Sanskrit institution in the south where students from the various Sanskrit pathshalas could obtain higher education” (Thinley, 2010). The government had also encouraged inter marriages between southern and northern Bhutanese with cash incentives of Nu. 10,000/- (Thinley, 2010).

However, during the 1960s Bhutan abolished its isolation policy and adopted the 1st five year development plan. This led to increased economy and free access to education, health,

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<sup>3</sup> RCSC is the commission that is responsible for appointing civil employment



employment, subsidized agricultural inputs, rural credit schemes and politically security (Jigme Thinley, Blogpost). The combination of benefits and the lack of land to farm in the neighboring country, attracted waves of illegal immigrants into the small nation, along with the legal immigrants (Thinley, 2010; Amnesty International, 1992).

These immigrants used the following tactics to become citizens of the nation. One, Tactics such as adopting entire families by individuals or families to increase their assets was used. Two, as a criteria for becoming citizen in Bhutan was to own land and a house “immigrants would hire or purchase plots large enough for a hut, then build a hut and acquire a plot number” (Thinley, 2010). Three, Bhutan recruited people from Nepal to transport cash crops and several entered, and never returned. The National Assembly discontinued this practice in 1986 and farmers were given “soft loans” to purchase mules and ponies. Four, since registered houses and land ensured citizenship, immigrants brought those assets and the seller acquired new plots through "Kidu"<sup>4</sup> from the government. Five, it was reported that identity of the deceased were recycled and used by new members. Six, children were admitted to government schools and their certificates were used identification. Seven, entry also took place by “intimidation, bribery, force” (Thinley, 2010). Others also entered Bhutan through recruited for development projects as well.

These tactics of entering into the country was “discovered or proven during the census of 1988” (Thinley, 2010). These methods were done in a systematic manner and was branded as "silent invasion" by Jigme Thinley. This marked the 1990s as a period of intense immigration into Bhutan. Jigme Thinley also identified that this influx of people in the south led to the following problem which then led to strict policies measures taken against them:

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<sup>4</sup> Special compensation

One, the increase of southern population caused for encroachment on government protected forest. Government measures to conserve the environment failed, and “eco-environmental degradation became uncontrollable in the south” (Thinley, 2010). Slash and burn method were popular practices among the Southerners.

Two, the practice of polygamy had allowed a many to accrue many plots of land across the different blocks or dzongkhags (districts). They were also identified of building temporary housing despite their higher income which indicated a “lower sense of belonging” (Thinley,



2010).

Figure 2: Samtse, Sarpang and Samdrup Jongkhar on the map are the Southern *Dzongkhags* (States)

Three, disputes between the southern Bhutanese and their neighbours in the north arose as they extended northwards. These disputes took place around areas such as Paro, Ha and Chhukha.

Four, the South also had a growing population “ whose loyalty and allegiance lay outside their own country” (Jigme Thinley, 2010). They did not identify with the Bhutanese society as it became common among them to not have portraits of the King and Queen. Additionally, it was

also found that even “senior government officials and prominent farmers visited Nepal to obtain Nepalese citizenship cards” (Jigme Thinley). The classification of caste among the population also became a problem.

The growing Southern population and their lack of attachment to the country was seen to endanger the Bhutanese culture and identity. The unique Bhutanese identity was always used as an important factor to maintain sovereignty in a nation, whose borders were constantly challenged by the British or the neighbouring nations such as China. Thus, the fear of losing one's identity vis a vis one's sovereignty was perceived a real threat. The regime feared that the country might meet a fate similar to Sikkim (Pulla & Dahal, 2016).

In some ways the reaction of Bhutan towards the Lhotshmapa people can be seen as a reversal of the integration policies because the government's limit was not respected. The implementation of various citizenship laws such as granting citizenship based on the length of residence in Bhutan known as the 1958 Citizenship Act was enacted. This act declared that citizenship can be only acquired by “birth, registration or naturalization” (Rizal, 2004: 159). Both parents were required to be Bhutanese for birth citizenship, for registration, permanent documents prior to 1985 was necessary and for naturalization citizenship one has to have the ability to read and write Dzongkha, the national language. Strict marriage laws were introduced in 1980, whereby marrying non-Bhutanese resulted into lack of benefits from the government. However, this law has relaxed because if the father is Bhutanese one could acquire citizenship. In 1990, Lhotshampas were also required to obtain which was a policed issued clearance certificate. Additionally, in 1989, Bhutan adopted the famous “One Nation, One people” policy which emphasized the unity of the Drukpa culture and tradition and further solidified the

exclusion of the Lhotsampas. This policy promoted the Bhutanese way of life or "Driglam Namzhag,"<sup>5</sup> that promoted traditions such as wearing the national dress to work and school.

## Analysis

### The Enigma of Bhutan

The international momentum that this issue gained has led to many different NGOs and mass international media to describe it as systematic “ethnic cleansing” of the Lhotsampa people. The UNHCR chief Sada Ogata has stated that the “[p]ersecution, torture, killing and the reprehensible practice of “ethnic cleansing” generate a huge flow of refugees.” *The New York Times* and *The Nation* has also followed a similar language for conceptualizing this event. However, these rhetorics, mainly produced by the West, have fallen into the greater SVS metaphor that the human rights advocates have been criticized to use.

In trying to understand this issue Bhutan as a state has been given the “savage” status, whereby, it has been demonized by the international world for taking the aforementioned strict citizenship measures. No effort has been made to underscore the Bhutanese history nor the circumstances under which such measures were taken.

The expelled Lhotshampa population has been categorized as the “victims,” against whom the punitive actions have been taken. Despite the various reported instances of violence from the Lhotshampa side they are still referred to as “refugee” who were wronged. Amnesty international has reported that “several anti-national and seditious letters and booklets had been

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<sup>5</sup> Driglam Namzhag is the official behaviour, tradition and dress code of Bhutan

distributed to government officers and to the public” by the Bhutan People’s Party (BPP)<sup>6</sup> during their time in Bhutan (Amnesty International, 1992:1). Cases of the anti nationals attacking and beheading of census officers, destroying on public facilities such as bombing schools, harassing teachers in schools, stripping of people wearing *gho* (male national dress) and coercing villagers to donate the BPP were all acknowledged by Amnesty International. Additionally, it was also known that 39 people were killed, 75 were kidnapped and 10 were raped by the members of opposition groups in the south (Amnesty International, 1992). Despite the recorded violence from the other side, Amnesty International has still stated that, “it is not always clear that evidence exists to indicate the political motivation behind the acts” (1992 :11). The failure to take equal actions towards the opposition violators shows the one sided approach the human rights corpus usually takes.

The higher “ethical” stance that NGOs and mass media has taken by advocating for the “victims” has fulfilled the saviour metaphor. Supporting the Southern population by speaking for them and blaming Bhutan for all the causes of misery has portrayed the human rights corpus as a “prince charming” fighting for the rights of the innocent. They have also extended this mentality towards “saving” the “savage” from its wrongs. *The Nation* has reported that “[t]he unspoken implication is that it was necessary to purge these people in order to save the last Buddhist Kingdom” (2012: 9). The SVS metaphor has produced a biased, unidimensional and incomplete approach. It is noticeable that they chose to acknowledge sensitive and complex issue only after the conflict. There is no regard given to what has happened before or even during the conflict. This is a serious limitation that the human rights advocates face, as it creates a simple black/white perspective and an incomplete narrative.

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<sup>6</sup> BPP is the political party of the Lhotshampa people who were removed

## **Beyond Bhutan**

It is also noteworthy that India's "hands of attitude" has also been criticized by the international body (Rizal, 2004). India had not allowed the expelled population to enter into Bhutan through India ground and additionally, set up military bases at the border. Their desire to not get involved has been viewed as unethical and inhumane.

However, apprehending emerging powerful nations such as India appears to be a part of bigger agenda that the human rights corpus withholds. Similar rhetoric of disdain can also be seen against the judicial systems of Brazil, South Africa, Dominican Republic, Iran, Russia and so on (The Guardian, 2013). However, attacking these nations for its lack of humanity and insisting upon the importance of universal human rights has shown little evidence that it has improved the wellbeing of people (The Guardian, 2013).

Furthermore, the same criticism has not been applied on the Western nations. The unjust incarceration of Black males in the US or the recent flint water crisis problem that fails to provided safe drinking water fades into insignificance. Turning a blind eye to these violations are also reflective of the lack of morality, human rights advocates have when it comes to evaluating the West.

## Discussion

A single case study was chosen rather than a comparative approach due to the lack of recorded account on the Drukpa/Lhotshampa issue. The Bhutanese account on the whole issue was especially lacking as it was not a part of the main human rights' dialogue. An in-depth study was required in order to capture a holistic point of view.

Bhutan's case appears to be just a small representation of a bigger, international issue. The universalization of human rights has produced a very incomplete narrative on complex issues, especially for the non western nations. It is also important to understand that the expulsion of Lhotshampa people was not an overnight process. Strict measures were taken as the limits to legal immigration was violated by the Lhotshampas. The only reason why Bhutan has been able to maintain its independence is because of its unique identity and culture. Therefore, any threat to sovereignty is a vulnerable and sensitive issue for Bhutan.

It is with complete awareness that I acknowledge by bias of being a citizen of Bhutan. And this is not to say that what Bhutan did was completely right. The aim of this project is not to defend Bhutan for its action but rather to add Bhutan's voice in the existing dialogue.

It can be observed that the human rights corpus that advocates for the universalization of human rights and an overall elevation of the "natural rights" of people, lacks multidimensionality. Measures such as multiculturalism and inclusiveness should be implemented to fully understand complex issues at large. The discontent that exist between the ideology and the practices of the western human rights has to be addressed before problematizing its practices elsewhere. It is vital that the human rights advocates should embody critical self reflection which it heavily tries to impose on others.

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